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ABSTRACT

In 1975, Quill and Scroll gathered responses from high school yearbook advisers about the student journalists on their staffs. Separate tables summarize data on (1) sources of staff personnel in terms of specified categories; (2) competing interests which interfere with yearbook work; (3) factors that limit participation on yearbook staff; (4) yearbook tasks which require excessive time; (5) need for classroom instruction for specific tasks; (6) letter grades that advisers would have given their staff members; (7) ratings of staff qualifications; and (8) comparisons with other active students. (AA)

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EVALUATING STUDENT JOURNALISTS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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(Statement may be printed with acknowledgment.)

How do you define a high school? Some suggest that it is a play pen or waiting room. Others that it is an isolation ward or penal farm. A few may recognize it as a transformation laboratory.

Why go to high school? Good grades pave the way to college. So does athletic glory with instant recognition. Cheerleaders with students in plays, band, chorus, and student politics achieve visibility that is gratifying.

Behind the scenes the student journalist produces a physical product--a mix of dollars, printer's ink, paper, film, color, visual images, alphabetic symbols with hours of sweat--that is, a newspaper, magazine, or yearbook.

But what happens to him--that obscure fact finder who applauds other student volunteers? A Quill and Scroll pin? Maybe? A trip to a press conference? Perhaps. A hurried mention in an awards assembly? Possibly.

True, the physical product is the output of the publishing process. The critical service judges in time give their appraisal. Meanwhile peers have already judged it without feeling themselves accountable for its quality.

What is the human output? The raw material for the human equation was assembled by half a dozen to half a hundred more or less willing hands, heads, and hearts. Did they benefit?

To answer these questions, consider data gathered by Quill and Scroll in a 1975 inquiry supplemented by other relevant findings. The major and minor sources of yearbook staff members are reported here with the extent to which sources generally are considered significant. All tables report percentage.

TABLE 1.--Extent to which identified categories of teenagers were major or minor sources of staff personnel (in percentages).

Source	Major	Minor	Source	Major	Minor
Girls	75	10	Freshmen	12	20
Seniors	69	23	Art Class	11	36
Photographers	54	35	Elite Clique	1	22
Juniors	50	40	Low Income Family	9	23
A in English	39	28	Ethnic Minority	8	27
Boys	35	49	C in English	8	32
B in English	30	40	Upper Income Family	7	31
Middle Income Family	26	21	Athlete	5	5
Sophomores	23	42	7th and 8th Grades	5	5

"Who cares?" One adviser asked this question with regard to ethnic minorities. "Never thought to ask," another replied. In any event the data reflect different

concepts of what schools are for, what teachers are for, what activities are for.

True, some schools may report that they have no minorities. Others may comment that few if any show up or qualify where the opportunity is provided. Such negative answers reflect a deplorable form of smug racism.

Probably more boys would be accepted on the staff. Unfortunately in many schools the sexist attitude persists that masculinity depends upon physical prowess proved by participation in sports. Such attitudes may deny girls greater participation in athletics. Comparisons of budgets usually indicate a favoritism difficult to approve.

To be sure, it is difficult to be on the yearbook staff and also to take part in other activities.

TABLE 2.--Extent to which competing interests interfere with effective yearbook staff members.

Part time job after school	72	Member--band, orchestra	34
First team in major sport	57	Students using school bus	33
Student council president	37	Cast of play, operetta	31

In some schools it may be difficult to serve on the yearbook staff and that of another publication. Similarly leaders in service, career, honorary, and other clubs--and cheerleaders--may be caught in a time squeeze. Still other students may be involved in church and community programs.

In the 1975 study yearbook advisers noted factors which interfered with the effectiveness of one or more of their staff members. Percentages follow:

TABLE 3.--Factors that limit participation on yearbook staff.

Other school activities	84	Non-school activities	37
Part time employment	82	Peer expectations	35
Local teenage lifestyles	44	Teacher expectations	32
Friendships, romance	41	Parent expectations	8
		Local controversies	8

Advisers widely agree that yearbook staff work may take an excessive or almost excessive amount of time. Obviously the extent to which such a comment may be accepted depends in part on organization policies and classroom instruction.

TABLE 4.--Extent to which staff yearbook tasks require excessive time.

Planning layouts for all pages and divisions	78
Editing all written copy, including headlines, cutlines	66
Editing all pictorial copy--art, photography	57
Financing the yearbook within local limitations	56
Learning technical aspects of yearbook photography	56
Learning technical aspects of yearbook printing	54
Maintaining good relations with the staff	35
Maintaining good relations with teachers, principals, other adults	29

Advisers report that the foregoing tasks impose heavy burdens on them. In most of these instances one-third to two-thirds assert that the time required is excessive or almost excessive. Nor is such a conclusion difficult to understand.

Certainly their tasks might be made easier if basic journalism and yearbook production courses were offered regularly for credit. If they could send several staff members to a summer workshop, their burdens might be lighter.

It is unfair, of course, for a teacher without journalism background to be required to provide instruction, guidance, and supervision which requires a sound knowledge of publication finance and printing processes as well as journalistic techniques.

Problems of advisers and staff members are complicated for numerous reasons. For example, many have no policy guidelines, staff manuals, style books, job specifications. The hand-to-mouth finance and catch-as-catch-can editing are ineffective.

What may be expected of publishing teams? A Quill and Scroll exploratory study of expectations of newspaper staff members based on 78 replies from California, Texas, and western staff advisers is worth noting.

From 10 per cent to 24 per cent believed that instruction in 30 specific tasks could be taught wholly on an extra-curricular basis. Obviously approximately two-thirds believe that classroom instruction, preferably including a second year, is desirable.

TABLE 5.--Extent to which advisers believe the specific tasks can be taught wholly on an extracurricular basis.

Measure a photograph to determine its dimensions enlarged or reduced	10
Understand libel, copyright, invasion of privacy	13
Write depth news stories based on investigative reporting	13
Prepare copy in the form required for newspaper use	13
Write 12-point, 14-point, 18-point headlines	14
Prepare a dummy for a letterpress newspaper	14
Write a feature article about people, places	15
Fit copy to fit space--determine approximately how many copy inches a typewritten story will take	16
Exercise good judgment in editing school newspaper	16
Understand relationship of past involvement to paper	16
Sell single copies or subscriptions	16
Sell advertising to local merchants	16
Differentiate between news stories and other narratives	17
Write longer news stories	18
Prepare the pasteup of an offset newspaper	18
Participate in choosing newspaper editor-in-chief	19
Detect bias, slant, editorializing in news	19
Write editorials supported by logic and facts	19
Write feature articles	19
Observe style rules	20

TABLE 5.--Continued

Plan makeup of inside pages	20
Plan makeup of page one	20
Cooperate as a member of a publishing team	20
Conduct a poll to determine student opinion	20
Write news stories of 1, 2, 3 or 4 paragraphs	21
Observe deadlines for newspaper content	22
Write sports news stories	23
Write a lead which answers 5Ws and how if necessary	24

The foregoing statements begin with what is regarded as most difficult and conclude with those regarded as less difficult, according to these newspaper advisers. A slightly lower percentage believed that a newspaper adviser who has had no college journalism courses can provide effective instruction.

Effective instruction may mean putting out a student publication which may have content that once may have been newsworthy or it may mean producing a news medium which wins the top or next to top rating in a nationwide evaluation program.

Consider measures of success in student publications. To the athlete or the cheerleader, success is becoming a member and staying on for the season.

TABLE 6.--Letter grades that publication advisers would have given various members of the publishing team.

Newspaper	A	B	C	Other
Editor	73	22	4	1
News editor	50	34	15	1
Sports editor	45	34	18	3
Feature editor	51	31	17	1
Manager	54	31	13	2
<u>Junior High Media</u>				
Editor	68	25	9	3
News editor	46	34	13	7
Sports editor	36	33	13	7
Feature editor	53	36	2	9
Manager	55	20	15	10
<u>Magazine</u>				
Editor	65	25	8	2
News editor	49	36	12	3
Sports editor	45	27	24	4
Feature editor	51	36	13	0
Manager	45	35	16	4
<u>Yearbook</u>				
Editor-in-chief	54	20	16	10
Manager	24	25	26	24
Advertising manager	25	32	28	15
Accounts manager	33	29	19	19
Editor--opening pages	43	34	16	7
Editor--academics	19	25	26	20

TABLE 6.--Continued

<u>Yearbook (continued)</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>Other</u>
Editor--school life	29	51	19	1
Editor--sports	26	42	24	8
Editor--copy	32	30	24	14
Editor--layout	38	42	16	4
Photographers	32	35	26	7
Art staff	31	38	24	7
Staff as a whole	23	48	27	2
With journalism background	32	31	24	13
With A in English	35	49	13	3
With B in English	18	59	20	3
With C in English	13	28	35	24
With typing skill	23	43	31	3
College preparatory	34	50	16	0
Not college preparatory	11	37	41	11
Ethnic minority	23	30	28	9
Low income family	17	38	25	20
Middle income family	25	42	28	5
Elite clique	3	23	40	34

Many of the advisers gave no grades for some of the categories, but the percentages are for those who gave grades, not of the total number of entries in this case.

TABLE 7.--Extent to which the majority of staff members of all yearbooks met listed qualifications by a percentage figure.

Character--fair, honest, responsible	87
Communication skills--speaking, writing, art	76
Special skills--typing or photography	59
Leadership potential--initiative, dependability, flexibility	59
Intellectual curiosity--fact-finding, verifying, documenting	50

TABLE 8.--Extent to which advisers rate staff members compared with other active students.

<u>Position</u>	<u>About the Same</u>	<u>Higher</u>	<u>Lower</u>
Stars in major sports	41	14	45
Stars in minor sports	57	18	25
Team members--major sports	41	20	29
Team members--minor sports	48	33	19
Student council--president	35	30	35
Student council--member	43	9	48
Service club member	40	50	10
Honor roll, merit scholar	49	41	10
Cheerleader	41	25	44
Homecoming queen	31	31	38
Newspaper staff	59	34	6
Homeroom representative	31	50	9

TABLE 8.--Continued

<u>Position</u>	<u>About the Same</u>	<u>Higher</u>	<u>Lower</u>
Class officers	37	44	19
Community student volunteers	39	49	12
Rich, influential family	34	35	31

Staff members and advisers may make a similar comparison in their own schools for their yearbook, newspaper, or magazine. If some teenagers currently receive recognition beyond what they deserve, it may be relevant to note that this is the outcome in part of the emphasis their activities have received in student media. Thus, publication staffs in part are to blame if they receive less recognition than they deserve.

Similarly the real values of the school in contrast with so-called educational goals may be reflected in the emphasis given to achievement.

Unfortunately though many yearbook staff members have grades of A and B in English, advisers cannot report that the majority of one half of the staffs have intellectual curiosity so needed in journalism, scholarship, and public affairs.

Relevant comments have been made from time to time. Each reader may adopt his own conclusions about what happens to student journalists. Certainly many emerge--despite obstacles with satisfactory and even excellent records of achievement.